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Leisure-time music groups and their localities: exploring the commercial, educational and reciprocal relationships of amateur music-making

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Abstract

Membership of an amateur musical group is typically understood in relation to members' experiences: this research poses new questions about the ways in which those groups connect with other people, organisations and venues in their locality to build a broader sense of culturally-engaged citizenship. The networks built by amateur musicians are often rendered invisible in the research literature and in policy-making in ways that limit the understanding and recognition of their contribution to contemporary society. Through a collaboration with the national network Making Music, this research identifies the commercial, educational and reciprocal relationships of a particular variety of amateur music-making. This article presents a new framework for understanding organised amateur musical engagement as part of a cultural ecology, and considers the implications of this for recognising and supporting leisure-time music groups.

Keywords: *amateur, leisure, music-making, cultural ecology, community*

Research context: the dualities of musical participation

> *"Even though we use all our local papers, advertising hoardings and radio we still find that people do not know we exist. We survive through word of mouth. And we cannot attract audiences to work that is not well known even though we mix it with more popular work. Venue is also a problem as the only one we have suitable is our local church—not always comfortable!"* (Choral society member, 2016)

The response above comes from a national survey undertaken by the Sheffield Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC)[1] with members of Making Music, the organisation supporting leisure-time music groups in the UK. With its talk of 'survival' and 'problems', this response is one of many amongst the 559 responses to show that while the benefits of collective music-making have been widely understood in recent research, sustaining and developing that musical practice is fraught with challenges in the current funding, cultural and educational climate. It highlights too how the activities of amateur musicians are intertwined with the places where they live, dependent on local venues and communication channels to attract an audience, recruit new members, and raise awareness of the place of an amateur group in its locality. These experiences underpin the

[1] http://www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/ For this project, Stephanie Pitts was the principal investigator, designing and implementing the survey, and leading the analysis. Some research support with statistical analysis and data coding was funded by The University of Sheffield and provided by Dr Tim Metcalfe and Dr Michael Bonshor, respectively.

research aims of this article, which are concerned with understanding i) how organised music groups can adapt to changing social and cultural circumstances; ii) what purpose they serve in providing access to music for their members and the wider local population; and iii) how they contribute to and depend upon the other cultural, educational and social elements of their neighbourhood.

In order to begin addressing these questions, this article draws upon substantial empirical evidence to make a case for considering amateur musical groups as part of their local *cultural ecology*. I have borrowed this term from anthropology, where it refers to the impact of human cultural choices (diet, political organisation, building etc.) on the environment[2]: here it is applied to the effects of musical group behaviours on their localities, some of which are deliberate and others the unintended consequences of past choices and ingrained habits. The term has overlap with other current debates on everyday participation[3] and cultural democracy[4], but differs in its focus on the arts and audiences that already exist and on the institutions and relationships that shape that existing environment. Concurrently with my research, the 'ecology' metaphor began to appear in Arts Council England (ACE) publications,[5] its use intended to encourage a move away from hierarchical views of arts provision in the UK towards a conception of 'three highly interactive spheres: publicly funded culture, commercial culture and homemade culture.'[6] The position of ACE in adopting this term has been heavily critiqued, as perpetuating the geographical, structural and cultural inequalities of the funding decisions made by that organisation.[7] While a distributor of public funds for the arts may indeed be seen as appropriating the 'homemade' or grassroots arts by drawing them into policy debates, there is nonetheless an implicit recognition that the funding of large institutions affects the other arts practices of that locality – and that greater evidence is needed as to what those effects could (or should) be.

In line with this debate, a focus on established musical groups and their members might appear to run counter to an increasing policy and research agenda around broadening access to the arts, particularly for under-represented sectors of the population.[8] At first glance, members of amateur musical groups of the kind supported by Making Music might be assumed to be part of the privileged, educated strata of society who most readily access the arts.[9] However, the limited qualitative evidence currently available shows this to be a flawed assumption: life history research with adult musicians shows that the route to amateur participation is not always a straightforward

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[2] Mark Q Sutton and Eugene Newton Anderson, *Introduction to cultural ecology* (2nd edn). (Lanham, Maryland, 2010).

[3] Abigail Gilmore, 'Cold spots, crap towns and cultural deserts: The role of place and geography in cultural participation and creative place-making', *Cultural Trends*, 22 (2013), 86-96.

[4] Nick Wilson, Jonathan Gross, and Anna Bull, 'Towards cultural democracy: Promoting cultural capabilities for everyone' (London, 2017). Retrieved from https://www.kcl.ac.uk/Cultural/-/Projects/Towards-cultural-democracy.aspx; also Steven Hadley and Eleonora Belfiore, 'Cultural democracy and cultural policy', *Cultural Trends*, 27 (2018), 218-223.

[5] Arts Council England, *This England: How Arts Council England uses its investment to shape a national cultural ecology.* (London, 2014).

[6] John Holden, *The Ecology of Culture A Report commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project* (London, 2015).

[7] Martin Cox, 'The Emperor's new ecology'*, Creative Industries Cluster Journal*, 1 (1). Online at https://cicj.wordpress.com/2018/11/05/the-emperors-new-ecology/

[8] Eleonora Belfiore, 'Whose cultural value? Representation, power and creative industries', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* (2018), 1-15.

[9] Leila Jancovich, 'The participation myth', *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 23 (2017), 107-121.; see also Simone Scherger and Mike Savage, 'Cultural transmission, educational attainment and social mobility', *The Sociological Review,* 58 (2010), 406-428.

one,[10]and ethnographic studies of musical groups reveal a variety of membership, particularly in choirs and brass bands.[11] Moreover, similarities between the music-making experiences of amateurs in established groups and participants in community intervention projects[12] suggest that an understanding of the experiences of those people with the available time and resources to make musical leisure choices might contribute to the better design and facilitation of projects with a more explicit social support agenda. I present the case here for recognising the rich seam of leisure-time music-making that exists in most UK towns and cities, and for considering the impact of these groups on shaping and supporting the cultural ecology of those places. In a climate where funding for the arts has been repeatedly affected by central and local government cuts,[13] this study highlights the cultural resources already available within thriving amateur groups, whose members are motivated by their own desire to make music together, but whose activities are shown in this study to make broader contributions to education, community and culture in their locality.

Focusing the research gaze on constituted amateur music groups makes apparent the binary divisions that exist in research and policy, whereby musical experiences that are connected in reality are abstractly divided for the purposes of funding, evaluation and theorising. These divisions include a lack of dialogue between professional arts, whose contribution to the economy is well-rehearsed, and amateur activity, which is viewed as contributing to wellbeing and social cohesion for its members. Likewise music education is investigated for its place (and its decline) in formal schooling, but rarely connected with the learning that occurs amongst audiences, amateur players, and participants in community arts projects, so neglecting the extent to which experience of music in schools (or lack thereof) has a role in shaping the attitudes and skills that young people take into their future lives. This article therefore begins with a literature review that focuses on these dualities and their impact in thinking about music and cultural engagement, with the aim that these competing arguments might be drawn together and viewed more coherently as a framework for understanding culture in people's lives and localities.

Amateurs / professionals

When this partnership project with Making Music was launched in 2016, their mission statement was 'helping amateur music flourish'. However, their Executive Director's feedback on my draft report included a request to remove the term 'amateur', since Making Music had discovered in their concurrent 'Exploring Music Making' project[14] that folk and jazz musicians, particularly, made little use of the amateur/professional separation that is entrenched in classical music discourse: therefore 'after much discussion we have started using the term "leisure-time music groups"[15] as one that—hopefully—reflects that this is about people coming together to make music but not to earn the main part of their living' (Barbara Eifler, personal communication, 2017).

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[10] Stephanie E. Pitts, *Chances and Choices: Exploring the Impact of Music Education.* (New York, 2012).
[11] Ruth Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians: Music-Making in an English Town* (Middletown, CT, 1989/2007).
[12] Betty A. Bailey and Jane W. Davidson, 'Effects of group singing and performance for marginalized and middle-class singers', *Psychology of Music,* 33 (2005): 269-303.
[13] Adrian Harvey, *Funding arts and culture in a time of austerity* (London, 2016). Available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk; see also frequent news reports on *www.artsprofessional.co.uk*.
[14] https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/news/introducing-our-new-project-exploring-music-making
[15] This term has been adopted throughout this article, abbreviated to LMG; however, the term 'amateur' still has international currency and value in describing the activities of those LMG members, and so has been used interchangeably in places.

This change in terminology reflects a long-running disquiet with the term 'amateur' that seems not to have been addressed by previous research on musical participation. Such research either uses the word unproblematically[16] or explicitly claims its etymology, 'for the love of it', as characterising the motivations to engage in creative activities outside paid work.[17] Nonetheless, in common parlance, amateur or 'amateurish' is sometimes used as a synonym for poor quality, or else as a reason not to pay musicians who are operating at a high standard but have other forms of regular income.[18] In theatre, the term 'am-dram' makes a more strongly derogatory separation from professional theatre, and yet a study with the Royal Shakespeare Company's 'Open Stages' outreach project found that amateur actors were equally fearful of being 'too actory' in warm-ups and improvisation tasks.[19] The relationship between amateur and professional spheres of creative activities appears to be at best an ambivalent one, emphasising difference rather than similarity – and yet the challenges facing performing groups in attracting audiences, resources and support have much in common, whether their work is publicly subsidised or reliant on volunteers.

Examples of professional and amateur musicians explicitly aligning their aims are rare and under-researched: one such is the Danish Royal Theatre's Audience Orchestra, a new initiative that invites new and lapsed amateur players to rehearse once a week with professional members of the orchestra, alongside a programme of instrumental and theory lessons.[20] Here the emphasis is on bringing audience members further into the professional music-making world, in what might be considered 'outreach at home': increasing the cultural engagement of already active arts participants, rather than (or alongside) work with disadvantaged communities to more socially-focused goals. Embracing the similarities in professional and amateur artistic practice and debate could be mutually beneficial to these two worlds of creative activity, and so help to strengthen the case for supporting arts engagement across the whole cultural ecology.

Community music / music in the community

The musical motivations and experiences of leisure-time music group (LMG) members fall into a research void between music and wellbeing on the one hand, which explores the benefits of participation such as the promotion of health[21] and positive ageing[22], and community music on the other, which gives prominence to intervention projects with socially disadvantaged groups.[23] Such

[16] Examples include: Mark Katz, 'The amateur in the age of mechanical music', in Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies* (Oxford, 2012); and Stephanie E. Pitts, Katharine Robinson, and Kunshan Goh, 'Not playing any more: A qualitative investigation of why amateur musicians cease or continue membership of performing ensembles', *International Journal of Community Music,* 8.2 (2015), 129-147.
[17] Wayne Booth, *For the Love of it: Amateuring and its Rivals* (Chicago, 1999).
[18] For further discussion of the amateur-professional continuum in music, see Rosalynd Smith, 'Symphonic choirs: understanding the borders of professionalism', in Karen Ahlquist (ed.) *Chorus and Community* (2006)
[19] Molly Flynn, 'Amateur hour: culture, capital, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's Open Stages initiative', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 22.4 (2017): 482-499 at 490.
[20] https://www.reseo.org/opera-house/royal-danish-theatre I am grateful to delegates at the Joint Council of Amateur Arts Associations (AKKS) conference in Copenhagen, September 2018, for introducing me to this programme.
[21] Even Ruud, 'Can music serve as a "cultural immunogen"? An explorative study', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being,* 8.1 (2013), 20597.
[22] Andrea Creech, Susan Hallam, Maria Varvarigou, and Hilary McQueen, *Active Ageing with Music: Supporting Wellbeing in the Third and Fourth Ages* (London, 2014).
[23] Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Lee Higgins (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music* (Oxford, 2018).

evaluations place their emphasis on how musical participation effects change for its group members: studies of choral singing have consistently shown how it improves psychological health, increases confidence and provides access to social support networks,[24] while a recent review of 25 years of research with the New Horizons band movement shows that the narratives of the positive effects of belonging to an amateur orchestra are similarly well established.[25] Rather less is known about the experiences of people who join these groups but find the experience unsatisfactory,[26] or those who feel excluded from joining through lack of opportunity, confidence or 'social capital'.[27]

The benefits reported in these studies are typically 'extra-musical'[28] or 'instrumental',[29] concerned with music as a vehicle for personal or social growth, rather than an end in itself. Giving prominence to the secondary benefits of music-making creates the shorthand seen frequently in media reports on how 'music makes you smarter, stronger and might save your life',[30] and forms a key part of the advocacy for supporting music and arts projects with prisoners, refugees and other vulnerable groups. However, these are rarely the principal motivations for LMG members, who instead cite creative challenge, rehearsal enjoyment and performance satisfaction as drivers for continued musical leisure activity,[31] and experience wellbeing and relaxation as 'unanticipated side effects'.[32] Separating musical and 'extra-musical' benefits is to some extent a false distinction, with rehearsal enjoyment, to take one example, being related to multiple aspects including liking for the musical repertoire, pleasure in achieving musical goals, and satisfaction in collaboration. It is highly unlikely, however, that someone would join a musical group purely to make themselves better at collaboration, just as nobody goes to the theatre in order to improve their concentration skills (though this might be an unintended outcome). Self-generated group musical activity therefore seems to be understood and written about differently from the organised interventions of 'community music', and yet these disciplinary research boundaries could be obscuring some important similarities, both in the creative satisfactions of community projects, and in the socially engaged potential of LMGs.

Learning / participation

[24] Nick A. J. Stewart and Adam J. Lonsdale, 'It's better together: The psychological benefits of singing in a choir', *Psychology of Music,* 44.6 (2016), 1240-1254; Michael Bonshor, 'Sharing knowledge and power in adult amateur choral communities: The impact of communal learning on the experience of musical participation', *International Journal of Community Music*, 9.3 (2016), 291-305.
[25] William Dabback, Don Coffman, and Debbie Rohwer, 'New Horizons in print: a synthesis of primary sources', *International Journal of Community Music*, 11.2 (2018), 147-166.
[26] Stephanie E. Pitts and Katharine Robinson, 'Dropping in and dropping out: experiences of sustaining and ceasing amateur participation in classical music', *British Journal of Music Education*, 33.3 (2016), 327-346.
[27] Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital (*Distinction,* 1979/tr. 1984), see Bob Price, . 'Social capital and factors affecting civic engagement as reported by leaders of voluntary associations', *The Social Science Journal*, 39 (2002): 119-127.
[28] Frances H. Rauscher and Sean C. Hinton, 'Music instruction and its diverse extra-musical benefits', *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 29 (2011): 215-226.
[29] Jennifer Radbourne, Hilary Glow and Katya Johanson, 'Measuring the intrinsic benefits of arts attendance', *Cultural Trends*, 19 (2010): 307-324
[30] Bill Stieg, Music makes you smarter, stronger and might save your life. *Men's Health* (2016) : https://www.menshealth.com/health/a19535056/healing-power-of-music/ (Accessed 18th May 2018)
[31] Stephanie E. Pitts, *Valuing Musical Participation* (Aldershot, 2005); Roger Mantie and Gareth Dylan Smith (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Music Making and Leisure* (New York, 2016).
[32] Roger Palmer, 'Questions arising from the views of some members of four amateur classical music organizations', *International Journal of Community Music,* 1. 2 (2008), 203–216 at 211.

Another misleading binary division in the research and practice surrounding leisure-time music-making occurs around questions of education. Music education is structurally separated from arts and culture in several areas of UK policy and funding: for example, the Music Education Hubs that provide instrumental lessons for young people in most UK cities and regions are answerable to Arts Council England, which distributes funds allocated by the Department for Education (DfE) and governs the Hubs according to criteria agreed by Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).[33] The Arts and Humanities Research Council excludes education from its funding remit for arts and culture, despite a recent emphasis on exploring cultural value and impact, which are surely intertwined with young people's routes into accessing musical opportunities. School music education across England is undeniably in decline, with increasingly alarming reporting of reduced numbers of pupils taking music as an option for 16+ exams and of schools offering music to advanced level.[34] The overall picture is a fragmentary and concerning one, most often debated in its own terms, as an impoverishment of school experience for today's young people, but rarely considered for its future effects on cultural life more widely.

Alongside the decline of music within the school curriculum has come increasing emphasis on education programmes run by professional orchestras, venues and other arts organisations, with 'learning and participation' sometimes replacing school provision of musical opportunities. These projects, while often excellent and inspiring for the young people who access them, are notoriously under-researched,[35] tending to be evaluated for their value for money and the numbers of young people they reach, rather than for the new insights they offer on how music is learned and experienced. Arts organisations are driven towards offering these activities by funding streams and by a concern about ageing and declining audiences,[36] and without much opportunity to consider the way in which the requirement to be a teacher or animateur might change the identity of a professional musician.[37] Collaborations with schools are often reported to be difficult, with risks that hard-pressed, non-specialist teachers will see the delivery of a workshop by an arts organisation as a substitute for curriculum provision, unless professional development forms a deliberate additional aim of the project.[38] These parallel strands of music provision for young people clearly have similar goals at heart, namely to increase access to musical opportunity and excellence, but they remain on opposite sides of a divide between arts and education that serves neither very well.

This overview of the binary divisions in research on music-making and cultural engagement highlights the ways in which the activities of LMGs can go unnoticed and uncritiqued in debates on the state of Britain's cultural ecology. In order to put LMGs back in the picture, this article now draws upon a large-scale national survey with members of Making Music undertaken by Sheffield

[33] Department for Education, *The importance of music: A national plan for music education* (London, 2011), 11.
[34] See extensive evidence provided in *Music Education: State of the Nation*, Report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music Education, the Incorporated Society of Musicians and the University of Sussex, February 2019. Accessed 21st February 2019 at https://www.ism.org/images/images/State-of-the-Nation-Music-Education-WEB.pdf
[35] Douglas Lonie, *Early Years Evidence Review: Assessing the outcomes of early years music making* (London, 2010).
[36] Bonita Kolb, 'The Effect of Generational Change on Classical Music Concert Attendance and Orchestras' Responses in the UK and US', *Cultural Trends*, 11 (2001), 1–35.
[37] Don Lebler, Rosie Burt-Perkins, and Gemma Carey, 'What the students bring: Examining the attributes of commencing conservatoire students', International Journal of Music Education, 27.3 (2009), 232-249.
[38] Stephanie E. Pitts, 'Music, language and learning: Investigating the impact of a music workshop project in four English early years settings', *International Journal of Education and the Arts*, 17.2 (2016).

Performer and Audience Research Centre (SPARC), which provided data on an unprecedented scale to illustrate the challenges and possibilities of LMGs' contributions to the cultural life of their localities. In order to make the findings of the survey accessible and useful to the Making Music members who participated, an overview report of the study was made available online and provides further detail on methods and findings to complement this article.[39] The report highlighted three varieties of connection between LMGs and their localities – commercial, educational and reciprocal – and aimed to raise awareness for Making Music and its members of the contributions made by LMGs to their local communities, and to highlight the challenges and opportunities of extending these connections to achieve greater mutual benefit. After a brief overview of the survey and its methods, the following discussion explores those three varieties of connection and the contribution they make to dissolving some of the binary divisions discussed above, with the aim of generating a more integrated approach to understanding the cultural life of the UK's cities and regions.

A national survey of leisure-time music groups: methods and participants

The focus of this research on connections between LMGs and the places where they are situated was prompted by a desire by Making Music to be able to advocate for the positive effects of a thriving musical life on the villages, towns and cities where their member organisations operate. To investigate the question initially posed by Making Music – 'What is the impact of LMGs on their localities?' – a national online survey of members was undertaken in December 2016, distributed via the Making Music website and mailing list, through the SPARC website and on social media. Within a few weeks, 559 complete responses were submitted, so indicating a high level of interest in the topic amongst Making Music members, and generating a large and up to date picture of LMG engagement in the UK, adding depth and context to the demographic and frequency data collected by Arts Council England and others.[40] The survey used a mix of closed, quantitative questions which tested prior findings on motivations and experiences of arts engagement, as well as inviting open-ended, qualitative responses about the place of LMGs in members' lives and in the cultural, social and economic life of their locality.[41] The research design sought to find trends in LMG experiences, collecting a large enough sample to make meaningful comparisons between size, type and location of ensembles, but also aimed to capture nuances of individual experience and to understand the challenges and benefits of musical participation across the Making Music membership.

The responses from the Making Music member survey were analysed using quantitative and qualitative approaches: summary statistics were derived from the data to give an overview of respondents' views on motivations and experiences of participation, and then cross-referenced with the qualitative responses to generate further insight. Relationships between types of ensemble, size of audience, extent of local business support, and awareness of revenue generated for the local economy were explored through chi-squared tests, and qualitative responses used to inform the interpretation of these results.

It must be acknowledged at this point in the analysis that Making Music is an organisation with national coverage of a particular variety of musical participation, namely that of formally constituted musical groups that typically meet weekly to rehearse towards a public performance. The most recent figures provided by Making Music state that of over 3,500 member organisations, 59% are

[39] See http://www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/study-links-communities-leisure-time-music-groups/
[40] See reports and analysis at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/taking-part-survey
[41] The survey is available in full as an Appendix to the online report http://www.sparc.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Making-Music-Making-Communities-overview-report-PUB-Feb-2018.pdf.

vocal groups, 28% are instrumental groups and 13% are amateur promoters; my sample reflected this with a majority of responses coming from vocal ensembles (62%), including choral societies and community choirs, alongside orchestras (13%) and a range of smaller or more specialist ensembles, including brass, wind and concert bands, and concert promoters. The portrayal of UK leisure-time music-making offered in this study is therefore substantial, but nonetheless partial, reflecting the historically dominant model of organised, directed groups, usually paying subscription fees and working towards public performance of notated, classically-influenced repertoire. There are signs within the responses, and also in Making Music's five year plan and ongoing projects,[42] of increasing recognition that this is an incomplete picture of the UK amateur music scene, which largely misses the many more informal, socially and musically diverse groups that also flourish as part of the musical life of contemporary Britain. Extending the research to encompass a fuller range of leisure-time musical groups was beyond the scope of this partnership project, but the groundwork is laid here for reframing the understanding of cultural connections across local groups of all kinds.

Making connections: LMGs and their localities

The most notable finding of the national survey was that awareness of the wider impact of their activities is not currently prominent in most LMG members' thinking: the majority are understandably motivated by their own pleasure in group music-making, by loyalty to their LMG and its continued existence and success, and by attracting an audience to enjoy the results of their rehearsing in a public performance. The survey answers revealed some frustrations with the difficulties of making connections with local organisations, mainly expressed as concerns about recruiting members and audiences, a process which was felt to be insufficiently supported by local newspapers, schools and potential sources of funding, such as the town or city council. Where LMGs had a more explicitly educational or community-focused remit, such as the community choirs and brass bands who responded, there was greater awareness of the positive contribution made to the locality, and frustrations focused instead on being 'at capacity' for this activity, owing to limits on resources and members' available time. The following analysis and discussion therefore focuses on the attitudes and challenges around building local connections, and illustrates how defining and delimiting the social goals and remit of their work could help LMGs in dealing with some of those tensions.

Commercial connections

Attempts to demonstrate the value of the arts habitually reach for economic evidence that will be persuasive to politicians and funders,[43] but responses to the Making Music survey showed an understandable lack of fluency in speaking this language of advocacy. LMG members were frustrated by lack of funding for their activities and in some cases noted a decline in support that had previously been available, citing cuts in local newspaper coverage, fewer available grants from councils and charities, and a reluctance to increase income in ways that would directly affect

[42] Making Music five year plan available at https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/sites/makingmusic.org.uk/files/Documents/Resources/5YearPlanPUBLIC.pdf ; strategies for broadening membership and supporting a greater variety of musical groups are addressed further in 'Exploring Music Making', an internal report by Fiona Goh, Sept 2018.

[43] Darren Henley's book *The Arts Dividend: Why Investment in Culture Pays* (London, 2016) reviews the benefits of presentational arts for a thriving UK cultural economy, but makes no mention of amateur and participatory arts, for which many of the same arguments could be made.

members or audiences through subscription or ticket prices. Some responses linked these concerns directly with their thinking on access and opportunity, noting that younger people might be put off by the costs of participation, and disadvantaged groups unable to afford them.[44] Difficulties of attracting audiences might have a similarly inhibiting effect, and since for many LMGs the majority of their audience are friends and family members, any increase in ticket prices would be felt close to home.

There was a significant relationship[45] between the size of audience and the likelihood of support being provided by local businesses, with LMGs attracting audiences of over 250 people most likely to report having business sponsorship, often in the form of an advertisement in the programme. Orchestras and choirs fell most frequently into this category, while community choirs were more likely to receive donations from the local organisations for whom they provided free music at fundraising events. The economic model for different sizes and types of LMG therefore varied, partly in relation to their aims and goals: remaining financially sustainable is a more substantial task for a large choral society putting on concerts in a hired venue, for example, but the opportunities for raising subs from members and charging for tickets are greater than for a small community ensemble. The treasurers and chairs of LMGs who responded inevitably showed the greatest awareness of financial circumstances, and in some cases described how this responsibility detracted from the pleasure of music-making: "as chairman I'm spending all my free time [on publicity] and it's not sustainable" and "it's a strain doing it all, working full time and playing in three orchestras".

Some respondents were able to identify ways in which their LMG generated revenue for the local economy around rehearsals and performances, whether through performers having a drink together, audience members parking and eating locally, the use of local printers for publicity, or the purchase of gifts for soloists and refreshments for the interval. More specific examples included the benefit to local charity shops "if we've decided that we're going to wear a certain colour for a concert", and the potential increased sales for "a local book shop [that] sells tickets thus attracting potential customers". Responses were relatively low on this question and some of the negative responses showed a tendency to underestimate the financial impact of a concert: one "no" was followed by the statement "a small amount of printing and flower sales", suggesting that other groups would have been similarly dismissive of a relatively small economic effect. Others, most notably the larger orchestras, reported more confidently on the impact of "bringing 600-800 people into town centre who patronise local restaurants and shops". Commercial connections with the locality might therefore be understood of being of least interest to LMGs, though in some cases a vital part of their financial sustainability, and one with potential to be utilised more effectively.

As noted in the literature review, LMGs fall into the gaps between community music and professional performance, with more traditionally constituted ensembles (e.g. choral societies and symphony orchestras) operating a performance model which presents audience development and funding challenges even for professional groups with greater resources. There were frustrations evident in the qualitative responses about the efforts necessary to secure audiences for concerts, though these were avoided at the two extremes of the spectrum of ensembles involved: on the one hand, the community choirs who sang most often at street festivals and other local events and had no need to attract a specific audience, and on the other, the semi-professional groups who were booked by venues or charities who took care of organisation and publicity. The more fluid models of

[44] 76% of LMGs reported charging membership subscriptions ('subs') of over £50 a year, including 44% with subs of over £100 annually.

[45] Chi-square tests showed a significant relationship: ($X^2 = 52.09$, $p < .001$). Further statistical detail is provided in the online report, but is not the primary focus of this article.

participation and presentation[46] found in folk music, for example, were under-represented in the Making Music membership, such that alternatives to the traditional model of a block of rehearsals followed by a public concert were rarely described. Instead, the expectations of the 'publicly funded' and 'commercial' spheres of arts activity are being applied to the 'homemade'[47] in ways that can put undue pressure on performers and audiences alike. In another demonstration of cultural ecology, further investigation of who attends – and does not attend – amateur performances could help to articulate the ways in which they are different in aims and ethos, though emphatically not necessarily in performance standard, from professionally promoted work; and therefore how both strands of arts provision in a locality might impact upon potential audiences.

Educational connections

The contribution of LMGs to the educational opportunities of their locality were expressed with greater conviction than the commercial links discussed above: many groups had specific schemes in place to support young players through bursaries and performance opportunities, or sought to make connections with local teachers and schools by linking their choices of repertoire to exam syllabi or by sharing concerts and workshops focused on families and young people. Sometimes this was expressed altruistically in terms of "supporting talented players" or "offering conducting opportunities", but there was also a concern for sustainability in the realisation that "it is getting more difficult to recruit new/younger members". Less explicitly expressed, though shown in previous research,[48]was a recognition that the current middle-aged and retired members of LMGs had laid the foundations of their lifelong participation in their school music education, in ways that are becoming less accessible as government and school priorities neglect the arts.[49]

The responses showed varying levels of success in building educational connections, with some LMGs having been discouraged by the lack of response from schools and other youth music groups, or an unwillingness or unavailability amongst their own members to undertake such work. Some responses suggested that LMGs had perhaps underestimated the effort involved in building and sustaining mutually beneficial educational relationships: probing further into the reasons why one member had "attempted to communicate with the local music education hubs but did not receive a single reply" would no doubt reveal pressures of time and a mismatch of priorities on both sides. Where these difficulties were acknowledged, it was with an air of resignation: one respondent noted that "young people are too busy to commit to a weekly mid-week rehearsal" while another suggested that "adult groups are seen not as a continuation of musical education but a distraction to hectic school activities that the school wants to showcase". In these examples, LMG members appear to be viewing themselves as isolated from other elements of local musical life, having found it difficult to build connections with others whose priorities or pace of life were seen to be different. There were other examples of LMGs implementing strategies to overcome that isolation, such as the group offering an "annual 'try without commitment' open rehearsal to interested young people aged 11 to 17". Flexibility in the format and commitment of LMG activities was recommended in a recent

[46] Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation*. (Chicago, 2008).
[47] Holden, *The Ecology of Culture*.
[48] Pitts, *Chances and Choices*.
[49] *Music Education: State of the Nation* notes that extra-curricular performance activities in schools are declining in parallel with classroom provision, due to greater pressure on students to take exam-related booster and revisions classes in the after-hours sessions traditionally reserved for arts and sports activities.

report by Making Music,[50] which highlighted the ways in which the traditional model of weekly rehearsals and annual membership presents barriers of access to people who might otherwise have much to contribute to LMG activities.

Where strong links between LMGs and their local music education provision did exist, they were often reliant on the social networks of individual members, and tended to be more prominent in orchestras than choirs. A higher proportion of working age members in orchestras, compared to the retired profile of many choral societies, gave access to schools and pupils and (less often) to sponsorship from members' businesses or workplaces, and arguably therefore a more up to date insight on how those schools and workplaces might best be able to relate to LMGs' activities. This finding highlights a hidden effect of the ageing profile of amateur music culture, which in addition to becoming further removed from the current educational and cultural experiences of young people as the LMG membership ages, loses access to the resources and networks of the workplaces formerly occupied by now-retired members. Conversely, one choir noted the difficulties of doing projects with schools when most members worked during the day, and the most successful connections therefore seemed to be in the sharing of activities that were already part of the LMGs' routines. Several orchestras offered concerto opportunities to the winners of city or regional music competitions, while programming concerts with schools groups was recognised as offering a boost to audience numbers as well as a performance opportunity for young people: "for our recent Christmas show we had a local children's brass band as the guest act, so both sets of friends and family could attend".

LMGs' educational connections encompassed a desire to recruit younger members, a keenness to make performances relevant to young people and families, and a willingness to work with school students and teachers. The sense of wanting to share a valued activity with a younger generation can be interpreted as both evangelical and preservationist, showing LMGs' awareness of the risks to their own sustainability in a generation that is culturally and technologically different from the one in which their current members acquired their musical enthusiasms and skills. Nonetheless, making such connections was effortful and sometimes frustrating, particularly where approaches to schools had not proved to be fruitful or appreciated. As the following discussion of reciprocal relationships will demonstrate further, a lack of clear purpose for educational partnerships was one part of the problem: markers of success were projects that had continued over a number of years, such as the annual competitions and shared performances. Other measures of change and development were less clearly articulated and, it should be remembered, not universally sought: capacity within LMGs to offer educational provision was limited by their own commitments beyond the group, and by its potential conflict with their primary motivation of making music together. There are tensions in evidence here between viewing LMGs as a force for change in their local community, and as a self-contained community of their own, such that resolving the dualities that currently separate amateur musicians from professional and educational worlds could bring costs as well as benefits.

Reciprocal connections

[50] Xenia Davis, *Young People and Participation in Amateur Music Groups* (London, 2016). Accessed 25th September 2017 at https://www.makingmusic.org.uk/resource/survey-results-young-people-and-participation-amateur-music-groups

Of the three types of local connections identified in the analysis, LMGs were most responsive when talking about relationships with other LMGs, which were seen by most as mutually beneficial, and with local charities, where funds raised and benefits to disadvantaged members of their local communities were a clear source of satisfaction. Connections were locally specific and often serendipitous, prompted by invitations and requests from local care homes, hospices and refuges, as well as from more open public events such as food markets and seasonal fairs. As with the school and business links discussed above, members' own social connections generated opportunities for their LMGs, and one response noted that "audience members are also members of many of the town's other social/cultural/educational groups". Just as Finnegan found in her ethnography of music-making in Milton Keynes in the 1980s,[51] the cross-fertilisation of membership across LMGs and other local organisations has a strong social networking effect,[52] highlighting again the practical and research benefits of understanding the cultural ecology of a location rather than considering each organisation in isolation.

LMGs varied in the extent to which they collaborated across their localities to cross-promote and share performances: promoting each other's concerts on websites and mailing lists was common, and seen as creating a collaborative culture which "helps bring people to our site as well as encouraging those other orchestras to mention our events in return". Some LMGs had gone further, in organising or contributing to shared brochures in order "to reach supporters of other groups who might not have known about us", and there were several responses from members of Classical Sheffield, an organisation set up by LMGs in the city to coordinate concert dates through a shared diary and promote events via a weekly listings email.[53] Sharing performances was also quite widespread, most often with the school or family focus discussed in the previous section, but also to provide variety in programming and share the costs and efforts of putting on an event. Only one respondent voiced the concern that "most groups are fearful of collaborating to innovate", explaining that LMGs struggling for audiences might be averse to promoting "rival groups" and might be more willing to do so outside their own locality. Such concerns were not widespread, but this respondent raises a valid point about the risks involved in collaboration, and the need for genuinely reciprocal agreements.

Connecting directly with the local community through events, performances and fundraising was a strong part of the purpose of some LMGs, and appeared to be more familiar territory for members reflecting on the contribution of their groups to the locality. Again, the type of activity varied across different ensembles, with choirs of all types more likely than instrumental ensembles to visit care homes, hospices, homeless shelters and other vulnerable groups. The greater ease with which a group of singers can assemble in an unfamiliar setting, compared with a group of instrumentalists, might increase the likelihood of getting invitations such as the choir who meet "next to our local hospice and they have invited us to sing to the patients in daycare"; a ukulele band was also amongst the groups noting that their links with care homes resulted in "more requests for bookings than we are able to fulfil", but for orchestras, community outreach was more likely to involve

[51] Finnegan, *The Hidden Musicians*.
[52] Nick Crossley, 'The man whose web expanded: Network dynamics in Manchester's post/punk music scene 1976–1980', *Poetics* 37.1 (2009), 24-49.
[53] https://classicalsheffield.org.uk/ Classical Sheffield was in its infancy when the survey was completed: it now hosts an annual weekend festival which combines professional and amateur local musicians in a mixed programme of free and paid for, ticketed and 'pop up' concerts. See the online report, *Classical: A Snapshot of Sheffield's Classical Music Sector*, commissioned by The University of Sheffield in 2018: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.763809!/file/sheffield-classical-report.pdf (accessed 21st February 2019).

inviting specific groups to come to their performances. Whatever the setting, members saw benefits in "cheering up" their audiences, who might not have other opportunities to hear or make live music, but also in sharing their love of music and raising the profile of the LMG in the locality. LMGs of all types engaged in fundraising for charities, and this too was acknowledged to have benefits for the LMG in reaching potential new audiences and members: "we have a specific charity for each concert, who sell tickets for their own funds and have a stall/display at the interval of the concert. They gain funds and exposure, we gain audience members who may (hopefully!) become regular attenders".

LMGs' connections are shown to operate across a continuum of interactions with other LMGs, charities and community and health settings in their localities: in any given situation, the primary purpose of a community-linked event might be to benefit the chosen audience, to raise funds (for the LMG or a charity), to recruit new members and/or to promote the LMG to new audiences. Underpinning all of these is the question of sustainability: by engaging with local beneficiaries, LMGs demonstrably advocate for their musical activities and potentially generate resources (whether funds or people) to continue them. This might come at a cost to the LMG, in placing additional demands upon their members, but appeared nonetheless to be viewed as a socially desirable form of "volunteerism", shown in other studies to be indicative of a high level of civic engagement.[54] LMGs might therefore be viewed as collections of people with the power to change their communities, and for the most socially-engaged groups this was a strong part of their motivation and purpose. For others, their resources and motivations were directed at the central activities of making music together, and only those LMGs who had tried to undertake volunteering activities with limited success seemed frustrated by the multiple potential outcomes of a thriving musical group.

The distinction noted in the literature between 'community music' and 'music in the community' is exposed here as being linked more to external funding and participant demographics than to musical activity and intention. LMG members are in many cases both the beneficiaries and the instigators of community music, by joining a group that will bring them personal, social and musical benefit and then (as in the examples discussed here) passing on those benefits through their interactions with other local groups and causes. Some community choirs make this dual-purpose existence explicit, but in many other cases, LMG members think of themselves principally as musicians seeking an opportunity to rehearse and (sometimes) perform, rather than having an agenda of social change for themselves or for others. There is some valuable comparative research to be done on how the motivations and experiences of participants differ between voluntary membership of LMGs and invited membership of a community music intervention project. Clearly the boundaries between these two kinds of participation are blurred, but a stronger articulation of their distinctive qualities in relation to access, motivation and experience could help to identify potential points of collaboration across musical activities within a given locality.

Conclusions and future directions

This study contributes fresh perspectives on the understanding of amateur music-making, by providing evidence that highlights the connections sought and experienced by LMGs in their localities and, conversely, the isolation and pressure felt by some groups as they struggled to maintain their survival in the face of dwindling membership and funding. The nationwide findings illustrate the satisfaction felt by those LMGs who had successfully engaged in charitable fundraising

[54] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, 2000).

or educational collaborations, but show that these aims exist in addition to the musical pleasures of LMG membership, and can therefore be experienced as a pressure or distraction. The commercial, educational and reciprocal relationships between LMGs and their localities are shown to be frequently under-developed or under-recognised, both by the LMG and by their local businesses, media outlets and schools. Not all LMGs sought to make these connections, being either clear in their focus on music-making for their own and audiences' enjoyment, or limited in their capacity to offer activities beyond this core purpose. Across their variety of sizes, musical focus and performance practices, LMGs are collectively shown to have a positive effect on their localities, bringing people together over shared musical experiences, charitable acts and causes, and local identity and social cohesion.

There are striking similarities between the challenges experienced by LMGs in recruiting younger members and larger audiences and the current pressures upon professional arts organisations, which are more prominently reflected in the research literature and in debates about cultural value. Similarly, the frustrations expressed over feeling under-valued in the local cultural economy echo those of music educators arguing for the place of their subject in the school curriculum. LMG members are already acting as 'cultural intermediaries'[55] as they make connections across the LMGs and other networks to which they belong, but their role in doing so is currently underestimated, even by themselves. Instinctive, but nonetheless important connections are being made by the amateur musicians who are also teachers, the members of the local church who support the concerts that take place there, the care home managers who invite the local choir to sing to residents, and countless other amateurs and volunteers whose activities outside music overlap and reinforce each town's social and cultural networks. Taking a more holistic view of cultural ecology is therefore shown to be desirable not only in research terms, for the clearer understanding it would offer of how varieties of cultural experience are connected in the lives of local populations, but also for the practical benefits that could come from building upon existing sharing of concerns, effective practice and combined efforts.

This research has developed a framework for documenting and critiquing the ways in which LMGs connect with their localities through commercial, educational and reciprocal relationships—in addition, of course, to the directly musical connections they make with audiences, often providing an accessible route into live musical listening for people who might otherwise not attend.[56] The national survey data lays robust foundations for mapping the goals and practices of a wider range of voluntary cultural activities in ways that help to demonstrate their contribution to contemporary society. The analysis identifies further questions to be addressed, both by adding qualitative detail to provide local and musical specificity to the findings, and through an investigation of perspectives of the teachers, parents, audiences and citizens with whom the LMGs currently seek to build their localised connections. The relationships of a cultural ecology are not unidirectional, and attitudes towards LMGs will be a fruitful area for in-depth, ethnographic investigation in the next stage of this research.

The research partnership with Making Music was driven by a desire to understand and demonstrate the impact of LMGs on their local communities. It is therefore a strongly positive conclusion that without changing their practices substantially, LMGs could be supported to articulate

[55] Beth Perry, Karen Smith, and Saskia Warren, 'Revealing and re-valuing cultural intermediaries in the "real" creative city: Insights from a diary-keeping exercise', *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18.6 (2015), 724-740.
[56] Sandra Garrido and Jennifer Macritchie, 'Audience engagement with community music performances: emotional contagion in audiences of a 'pro-am' orchestra in suburban Sydney', *Musicae Scientiae* (2018).

their contribution to their cultural ecology more clearly, and to build upon their commercial, reciprocal and educational connections to make that ecology more sustainable. The capacity to do this might not currently exist within each LMG itself for all the reasons already acknowledged, and so there is a clear role for a 'cultural broker' who could identify potential connections across cities and towns to harness the energy and contribution of LMGs to greater effect.[57] Building on the 'everyday participation' movement in research and practice,[58] this project has demonstrated that the long tradition of amateur, organised music-making in the UK remains a powerful force for social and cultural change. The power of amateur music-makers to shape the creative and cultural life of their communities should not be underestimated, and the views of LMGs represented here are a call to further action, and to future research which remembers to include this vibrant feature of UK towns, cities and regions in the cultural debate.

[57] This model exists in Ireland, where since 2007 every local authority has provided an Arts Office, though their activities are variable across the country, as reviewed in Ailbhe Kenny's report, *Knowing the Score: Local Authorities and Music* (Dublin, 2009).

[58] Andrew Miles & Lisanne Gibson 'Everyday participation and cultural value', *Cultural Trends*, 25 (2016), 151-157.